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Letter from Linda Grace Hoyer to John Updike, November 27, 1950

Linda Grace Hoyer

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November 27, 1950

Dear John:

The Saracen's eyes laugh, even when his bared teeth hold a dagger, especially when his bared teeth hold a dagger. But of course the Harvard Studio couldn't be expected to know about the fierce "aracens of Plowville. Our reactions to the picture were at first rather violent, with threats against Dean Leighton and all sorts of innocent bystanders. The resemblance to the precious little boy on the mantle and the straight-forward youth beside the radio becomes more obvious, however, as the days pass. Still the lean hardness of the young man from the Harvard Studio is rather startling. Yet time, fifteen whole months of it, has gone by since your last picture. In middle age we keep trying to stop progress, at least your family does. Your grand father says you have lost weight. As though being heavy were an asset. I think it was the strangeness of the picture that disturbed me. There is no longer any visible likeness to any of us. And what possible good can come of looking like your family? Didn't we send you away so that our prejudices and failures might end with us? And none of them are showing in this picture. It is a wonderful picture. Are you buying any of them for your own use? Is there a time limit on orders? I should like to have an 8x10 for myself when the hay has been sold. This very sophisticated-looking young man from the Harvard Studio will certainly replace Thurber's drawing as a conversation piece here. What is a heavy oil portrait anyway? Or what would you like us to do about it?

We found your geometry poem on the piano. Wouldn't it be much better if you got rid of the "yet is but" connective towards the end of it? Grandpa made a lengthy explanation of it and I think the Atlantic should be glad to get it. It's just obscure enough to be impressive. How's that for asininity? Blame grandpa's explanation.

The Trenton trip was a little like the ride in the ice storm except that we went through with it. Marian's food was extraordinary: twenty-three pound turkey, pumpkin pie with cocoanut, two kinds of potatoes, cranberry sauce, cabbage salad, relishes, succotash, and dressing, all perfect. How she did it without electricity and the roof leaving the house bit by bit, I can't imagine. Of course they were equally amazed by our appearance. We probably would not have gone if there had been any telephone service. No one, excepting your father, would have undertaken to go through all that wind and water for a meal. That's all the visit was. They were much too concerned about the destruction of their property to sit down and talk. So, we came right home. That is, we started right away and worked at it until ten o'clock that night. But your father enjoyed every minute of it, even the split minute when George's water tank blew off the barn and left us and all of his cows without a drop to drink. How was it in Harvard Square? The radio said Connecticut got the worst of it in New England. Don and Mary always seem to be attracting a hurricane wherever they go.

May we look for you on the twentieth?

Love,

Walter